United Nations A/55/573

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 November 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 87

Questions relating to information

Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Rapporteur: Mr. Shingo **Miyamoto** (Japan)

I. Introduction

1. At its 9th plenary meeting, on 11 September 2000, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-fifth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information" and to allocate it to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

2. The Fourth Committee considered the item at its 25th to 27th meetings, on 13 and 14 November 2000 (see A/C.4/55/SR.25-27).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-second session;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General (A/55/452);

(c) Letter dated 5 May 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly, transmitting the Declaration and the Programme of Action adopted by the South Summit of the Group of 77, held at Havana from 10 to 14 April 2000 (A/55/74);

(d) Letter dated 17 July 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations transmitting the report entitled "Impact of the information technology revolution on the economy and finance", adopted by the Finance Ministries of the Group of Seven at Fukuoka, Japan, on 8 July 2000.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/55/21).

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4. At the 25th meeting, on 13 November, the representative of Indonesia, the Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of the Committee and the proposals contained therein.[2]

5. At the same meeting, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information made an introductory statement (see A/C.4/55/SR.25).

6. At the 27th meeting, on 14 November, the Under-Secretary-General made a further statement (see A/C.4/55/SR.27).

II. Consideration of proposals contained in the report of the Committee on Information

A. Draft resolutions

7. At its 27th meeting, on 14 November, the Committee adopted, without a vote, draft resolutions A and B contained in paragraph 55 of the report of the Committee on Information (see para. 10).

B. Draft decision

8. At its 27th meeting, on 14 November, the Committee adopted, without a vote, the draft decision contained in paragraph 55 of the report of the Committee on Information (see para. 11).

9. At the same meeting, the representative of Armenia made a statement (see A/C.4/55/SR.27).

III. Recommendations of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

10. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

Questions relating to information

A
Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[3]

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[2] Ibid., *Supplement No. 21* (A/55/21), para. 55.

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/55/21).

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[4]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim at, in addition to bilateral cooperation, providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional

[4] A/55/452.

resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[5] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

B
United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to it relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations, and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization, as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations,

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

2. *Expresses its concern* that the gap in the information and communication technologies between the developed and the developing countries has continued to widen and that most developing countries are not benefiting from the present information and technology revolution, and, in this regard, underlines the necessity of rectifying the imbalances of the global information and technology revolution in order to make it more just, equitable and effective;

3. *Welcomes* Liberia and Mozambique to membership in the Committee on Information;

4. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to continue to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993 and other mandates as established by the General Assembly;

5. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[6]

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[5] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980*, vol. I, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

[6] A/AC.198/2000/2.

and encourages him to continue the reorientation exercise, while stressing the need to take into account the views of Member States, and requests him to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session;

6. *Welcomes* the initiatives that have been taken by the Department of Public Information to strengthen the public information system of the United Nations, and, in this regard, stresses the importance of a coherent and results-oriented approach being undertaken by the United Nations, the specialized agencies and the programmes and funds of the United Nations system involved in public information activities and the provision of resources for their implementation;

7. *Emphasizes* that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications;

8. *Takes note* of the note by the Secretary-General on programme 23, Public information, of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005,[7] and, emphasizing that the implementation of the broad objectives outlined in the proposal should be in accordance with the objectives set forth in relevant General Assembly resolutions regarding questions relating to information, requests the Secretary-General to proceed with the submission of the proposal to the Committee for Programme and Coordination for consideration, taking into account the amendments made by the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session, in accordance with section I of Assembly resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to focus, in particular, on educational institutions as key and indispensable partners of the United Nations in its efforts fully to inform the peoples of the world of its aims and activities;

10. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to strengthen further consultative arrangements between the Department of Public Information and other substantive departments of the Secretariat, in particular those dealing with development issues;

11. *Reaffirms* that United Nations information centres should continue to publicize United Nations activities and accomplishments in the areas of economic and social development, poverty eradication, debt relief, health, education, elimination of illiteracy, women's rights, children's rights, the plight of children in armed conflict, the sexual exploitation of children, the eradication of drug trafficking and environmental issues, as well as other issues of relevance;

12. *Welcomes* the contribution of the Department of Public Information to the efforts of the Secretary-General in closing the digital divide as a means of spurring economic growth and as a response to the continuing gulf between developed and developing countries, and, in this context, requests the Department further to enhance its role;

13. *Recalls* its resolution 54/113 of 10 December 1999 concerning the proclamation of 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and encourages the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity

[7] A/AC.198/2000/8.

of the Department of Public Information with a view to disseminating information on and drawing international attention to the dialogue among civilizations and the impact it could have on promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and international cooperation;

14. *Welcomes* the decision taken by the Department of Public Information to launch a new web site to publicize the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to implement the promotional campaign to ensure that the Year enjoys the broadest international support and to report thereon and also on all follow-up activities in this respect to the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session;

15. *Recalls* its resolutions 53/202 of 17 December 1998 and 54/254 of 15 March 2000, concerning the designation of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly as the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations and the convening, as an integral part of the Millennium Assembly, of the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the millennium promotional campaign,[8] and encourages him to continue to implement effective public information programmes in this regard so as to ensure that the outcome of the Summit is widely disseminated and enjoys broad international support;

16. *Appreciates and encourages* the efforts of the Department of Public Information in disseminating information to Member States regarding the promotion of women 's rights and gender equality;

17. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department from the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

18. *Stresses* the importance of enhancing the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information in the field of peacekeeping operations and its role in the selection process of spokespersons for United Nations peacekeeping operations or missions, and, in this regard, encourages the Department to second spokespersons who have the necessary skills for fulfilling the tasks of the operations or missions;

19. *Emphasizes* that all publications of the Department of Public Information, in accordance with existing mandates, should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications of the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

20. *Takes note* of the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General to make the Dag Hammarskjöld Library a virtual library with world outreach, making United Nations information and other acquired materials accessible electronically to a growing number of readers and users, and, at the same time, requests him to enrich the stock of books and journals in the Library, including publications on peace and security and development-related issues, to ensure that it continues to be a broadly accessible resource for information about the United Nations and its activities;

[8] A/AC.198/2000/10.

21. *Welcomes* the development of the United Nations News Service by the Department of Public Information, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to exert all efforts to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations web site and the United Nations News Service, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and that they maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

22. *Takes note* of the efforts of the Secretary-General in ensuring access for the representatives of Member States to the briefings organized at Headquarters by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General and in ensuring wider outreach of the outcome of such briefings, and requests him to consider taking further measures in this regard;

23. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that information presented to the media is made available to delegations fully and in a timely fashion;

24. *Reaffirms* the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres and information components in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, in particular in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is need for a better understanding of United Nations activities;

25. *Also reaffirms* the importance of all United Nations information centres meeting the primary objectives outlined by the Committee on Information in its report on its ninth session;[9]

26. *Emphasizes* that resources should be commensurate with the mandated programmes and activities of the United Nations information centres to ensure their full and effective implementation, expresses deep disappointment at the reduction of more than 40 per cent in the staffing of the information centres between the early and closing years of the last decade, and, in this context, acknowledges the generous contributions by several host Governments, as well as the partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations system and local partners, to maintain the present level of operations of the information centres;

27. *Takes note* of the reports of the Secretary-General on the United Nations information centres[10] and requests the Secretary-General to continue, if feasible and on a case-by-case basis, the integration policy in a cost-effective manner, taking into account the views of the host country to ensure that the information functions and the autonomy of United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, to meet the policy's stated objective of improving the provision of information by the United Nations, and, in this regard, requests him to continue his efforts to address the problems that affect the centres;

28. *Also takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme,[11] requests him to implement the views and opinions of

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[9] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21), sect. III.D.

[10] A/AC.198/2000/3, A/AC.198/2000/4 and A/AC.198/2000/5.

[11] A/AC.198/2000/3.

the host Governments concerned, as expressed in their replies to the questionnaire provided by the Secretariat, and also requests him to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session on the steps taken in this regard;

29. *Further takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the guidelines for the functioning of the United Nations information centres integrated with the field offices of the United Nations Development Programme;[12]

30. *Reaffirms* the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may consider necessary regarding the establishment and location of such centres, and, in this regard, welcomes the requests by Croatia, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Jamaica and Kyrgyzstan for information centres or information components;

31. *Stresses* the need to revitalize the centres that are currently not operational, for which requests have already been made by the countries concerned;

32. *Recalls* its resolution 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, in which it requested the Secretary-General to continue to study ways and means of rationalizing and effecting equitable disbursement of available resources to United Nations information centres, notes with great concern the existing imbalance in the available resources to the information centres in developing and developed countries and that, given the importance of this matter, more information is needed, and requests the Secretary-General to examine the situation thoroughly, taking into account all relevant factors, and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session;

33. *Requests* the Secretary-General to look into the possibility of appointing directors to those United Nations information centres that are not yet integrated and are under the temporary management of offices of the United Nations Development Programme to ensure the autonomous status of the centres;

34. *Welcomes* the action taken by some Member States with regard to providing financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the information centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis, bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial requirements for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

35. *Recognizes* the continuing enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials, and requests the Secretary-General to report on those activities;

36. *Expresses its full support* for wide, accurate, equal and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through the continuation and improvement of United Nations press releases, which should bring out the intergovernmental aspect of the Organization's work and deliberations, stresses the importance of having these press

[12] A/AC.198/2000/4.

releases issued in all official languages of the United Nations, and requests other relevant bodies of the General Assembly to give due consideration to this matter;

37. *Stresses* that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B;

38. *Encourages* an increase in the number of programmes of United Nations radio, in all available languages, on the United Nations web site;

39. *Takes note* of the efforts under way by the Department of Public Information to disseminate programmes directly to broadcasting stations all over the world in the six official languages, and, in that regard, stresses the need for impartiality and objectivity concerning information activities of the United Nations;

40. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to continue to include in its radio and television programming specific programmes addressing the needs of developing nations;

41. *Requests* the Secretary-General to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983 with regard to the introduction of full programming in French and Creole in the work programme of the Caribbean Unit of United Nations Radio;

42. *Welcomes* the progress report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the pilot project for the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations[13] and the redeployment of the necessary resources for this purpose;

43. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session a progress report on the results of the implementation of the pilot project, and declares its intention to examine before the end of 2001 and upon submission by the Secretary-General of his report, the final report on the results of the project with a view to taking a decision on the matter during its fifty-sixth session;

44. *Urges* the Secretary-General to maintain and strengthen the managerial capacity, staff resources, programme output and means of delivery of United Nations radio in the six official languages and, if feasible, in other languages, in order to ensure the success of the radio pilot project and, to this end, enhance coordination with the United Nations News Centre and the United Nations information centres, as well as the cooperation with national and international radio organizations in Member States;

45. *Underlines* the continuing importance of using traditional and mass media channels to disseminate information on the United Nations, and encourages the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to continue to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, including the Internet, in order to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the dissemination of information on the United Nations, in accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly and taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

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[13] A/AC.198/2000/6.

46. *Takes note* of the efforts by some United Nations information centres to establish their own web pages in local languages, and, in this respect, encourages the Department of Public Information to provide resources and technical facilities, in particular to United Nations information centres whose web pages are not yet operational, to develop web pages in the respective local languages in their host countries;

47. *Encourages* the Department of Public Information to continue its efforts to coordinate and rationalize the content of web pages of United Nations information centres using the same language in order to enhance the information services with a view to avoiding overlap and repetition;

48. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations web sites,[14] encourages the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all the official languages of the Organization, and requests him to continue to develop proposals for consideration by the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session, keeping in mind the building of modular parity, which should ultimately lead to achieving full parity among the official languages of the United Nations;

49. *Requests* the Secretary-General to include in his report, in accordance with paragraph 48 above, guidelines for content planning and publication on the United Nations web sites;

50. *Stresses* the importance of access to the United Nations treaty collection and the United Nations parliamentary documentation for the public, and commends the initiative of the Secretary-General to make the parliamentary documentation of the Organization available through the United Nations web site in all the official languages;

51. *Expresses its appreciation* to the Department of Public Information for conducting the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition, and calls for its further expansion so as to include a larger number of trainees from those countries;

52. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries in disseminating information on priority issues;

53. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours and to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up-to-date, relevant and technologically innovative as possible;

54. *Recalls* its resolutions concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular resolutions 51/138 B of 13 December 1996 and 52/172 of 16 December 1997, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of that disaster;

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[14] A/AC.198/2000/7-A/AC.172/2000/4.

55. *Also recalls* its resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998, concerning international cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, which has been affected by nuclear tests, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region;

56. *Further recalls* its resolutions 53/59 B of 3 December 1998 and 54/82 B, and urges the Department of Public Information to take the necessary measures, through the provision of relevant and objective information, towards achieving the major objectives set forth in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa,[15] and to publicize the activities of the open-ended working group established for that purpose;

57. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session and to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

58. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session;

59. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-sixth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

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11. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) also recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the number of members of the Committee on Information from ninety-five to ninety-seven and to appoint Armenia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya as members of the Committee.

[15] A/52/871-S/1998/318; see *Official Records of the Security Council, Fifty-third Year, Supplement for April, May and June 1998*, document S/1998/318.